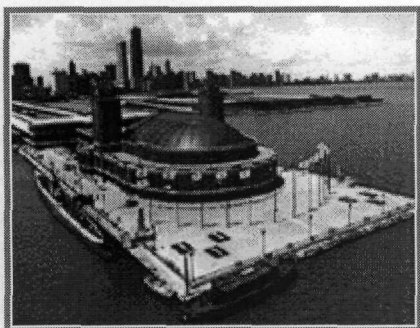




## Navy Pier Headhouse and Auditorium



**Address:** Grand Ave. and Streeter Dr. at Lake Michigan

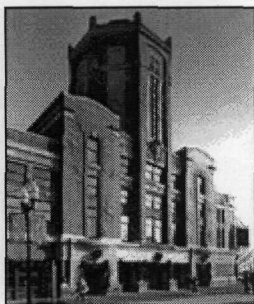
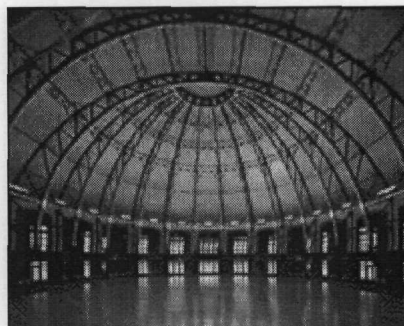
**Year Built:** 1916, Headhouse and east end buildings

**Architect:** Charles Sumner Frost

**Date Designated a Chicago**

**Landmark:** November 14, 1977

Navy Pier was inspired by the 1909 Plan for Chicago, which called for two large piers projecting into Lake Michigan. Built at a time when Chicago was a major inland port, "Municipal Pier No. 2" (the other pier was never built) was originally designed to accommodate shipping facilities. The structure's name was changed in 1927 to honor those who served in the U.S. Navy during World War I. Shipping declined in the 1930s and, during World War II, the pier was used for military training. From 1946 to 1965, the pier served as the Chicago campus for the University of Illinois. In 1992, the original sheds were torn down to make way for new recreational/convention uses, although the masonry structures located at either end of the pier were retained.



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### Illustrations

1. Auditorium Exterior, 1976
2. Auditorium Interior, 1976
3. Headhouse Exterior, 1997, photo by Bob Thall

EPA Region 5 Records Ctr.



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Figure 1. The lovely *Mineral City* at Walpole Island, Ontario, sometime around 1900. From a color postcard, printed in Germany and published by the Wolverine News Company, Detroit. William Lafferty Collection.

## *Introduction*

My home town, Chicago, has distinguished itself in myriad ways. The city's mythos within the fabric of American history is secure: Chicago is a leader in commerce and industry, site of world-class cultural and educational institutions, the cradle of modern American architecture, and the home of the Cubs. Of course, this mythos is slightly tarnished in some respects, the city being the apotheosis of "gangland" within the world's imagination, the avatar of "machine" politics, and, well, the home of the Cubs. However, one of Chicago's truly defining historical characteristics is how, at the turn-of-the-century, both the city's civic leaders and the populace in general embraced a pragmatic but enlightened approach to planning the city's inevitable and spectacular growth. In 1906 the Merchants Club, populated by the city's movers and shakers, organized a committee of local leading lights to draft "... a guide for the future development of Chicago." That guide became the Chicago Plan of 1909, executed under the direction of famed Chicago architect Daniel Burnham, who had overseen the design and construction of Chicago's Columbian Exposition sixteen years earlier. One of the Plan's most tangible and successful results is Chicago's comprehensive chain of lakefront parks.



feature of the Chicago Plan of 1909.

Lincoln Park began life when the Chicago City Council in 1864 separated 60 acres of the lakeside area of the Chicago Cemetery for use as a lakeshore park. It was originally named Lake Park, and, technically, its name was never officially changed to Lincoln Park, by which it became popularly known after that President's assassination. Over the next six decades through city and state appropriations, spurred especially by the vision provided by the Chicago Plan of 1909, the park increased in size dramatically, mostly by reclaiming land from the lake, eventually encompassing a popular zoo, boating lagoon, yacht harbor, and the edifices of the Chicago Academy of Sciences and the Chicago Historical Society, among other attractions. The original Lake Shore Drive (initially two miles in length and paved with stone) followed the park's shoreline, forming a convenient esplanade that became a landing for excursion boats. Although Lincoln Park increasingly became a favorite destination for Chicagoans, it lacked the convenient rail access that parks south of the Chicago River enjoyed; as a result, small passenger boats became indispensable in ferrying leisure-seekers to the park from points along the Chicago River downtown, near elevated and surface line rail stations.

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The Lincoln Park Boat Landing, circa 1906

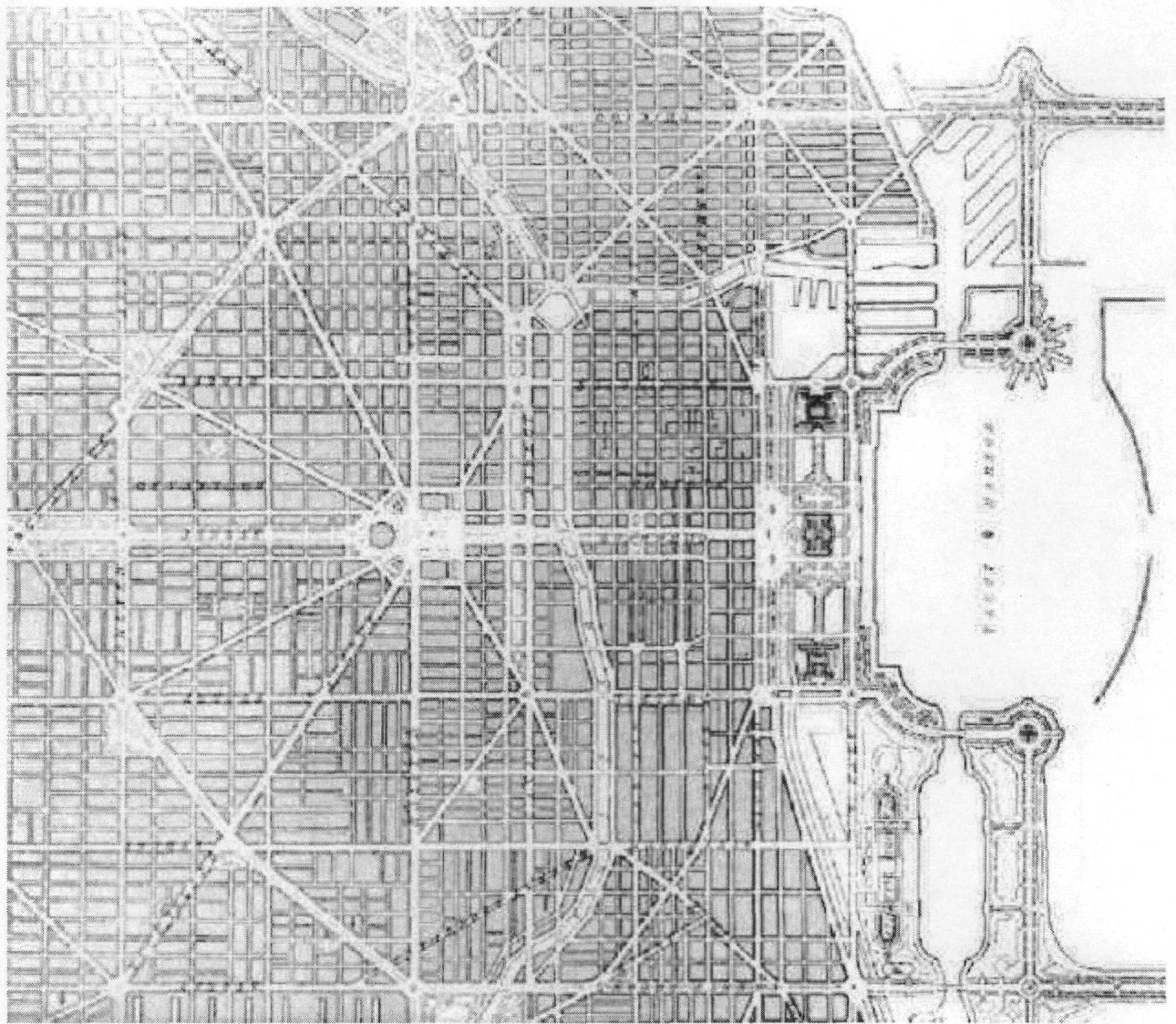


**Figure 2.** The esplanade at Lincoln Park served as a convenient boat landing for excursion boats disembarking passengers from spots along the Chicago River. Lake Shore Drive, to the right, literally and figuratively serves the "carriage trade." Later on, floating wooden rafts would be placed adjacent the seawall, making for a somewhat more convenient landing site. The vessel shown in this Library of Congress photograph appears to be the *Evening Star* 201984, built at

Three years in creation, predicated upon the newest ideas of the equally new discipline of urban planning, and buttressed by a massive public relations campaign, the Chicago Plan represented an interesting synthesis of commercial pragmatism allied with an earnest concern for improving the social and cultural lives of Chicago's citizenry, emblematic of the Progressive Republicanism that proved so influential during that era, a political disposition that advocated for government's activism on behalf of its constituents' overall welfare. (Younger readers might be amazed to learn that once upon a time Republicans were Democrats and Democrats were Republicans, but that's a subject for another website.) For example, on one hand the designers of the Plan, realizing that Chicago's economic pre-eminence rested upon its role as the center of commerce for the nation, advocated transportation reforms ranging from massive east-west and north-south thoroughfares uniting the city with its outlying neighbors (a harbinger of today's expressways) to the straightening of the South Branch of the Chicago River to facilitate waterborne commerce connecting to the Illinois River and on to the Gulf of Mexico. On the other hand, the Plan acknowledged the crucial importance of park areas within not only the city, but Cook County, as well, and set about to provide such areas for "rest and recreation, without which all work becomes drudgery," in the Plan's words.

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### The Chicago Plan of 1909



**Figure 1.** "Plan of the Complete System of Street Circulation" clearly indicates the Chicago that would evolve over the next thirty years. Municipal Pier is located at the above right, just north of what would be its actual position, and the symmetry of present day's Grant Park layout is plainly evident. The yacht basin to the east of the park and Northerly Island (once home to Meigs Airport) at the lower right also materialized, as did the "Athletic Grounds," now Soldier Field, just across the lagoon from Northerly Island. The general routes of the Eisenhower, Kennedy, and Dan Ryan Expressways are also obvious. From Daniel H. Burnham and Edward H. Bennett, *Plan of Chicago* (Chicago: The Commercial Club, 1909).

As a result of the Plan's recommendations and their gradual implementation over the next three decades, Chicago today enjoys over eighteen miles of continuous lakefront parks, from 79th street on the south to the Far North Side. This number of *Lake Michigan Maritime Marginalia* concerns two aspects of the Burnham's plan: Lincoln Park, which served as the paradigm for Chicago's lakefront park expansion, and Municipal (now Navy) Pier, which was a salient



Chicago in 1905. She stranded near St. Joseph, Michigan, on 13 November 1911, while doing what many smaller Chicago excursion boats did in the off-season, winter fishing. William Lafferty Collection.

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A direct outgrowth of the Chicago Plan turned out to be Municipal Pier, constructed between 1913 and 1916. Although the pier was primarily intended to provide a convenient terminal for passenger and package freight vessels, keeping them out of the constricted Chicago River with its many bridges, it also provided recreational facilities at its outer end, half a mile into Lake Michigan. Served by a traction spur extending its length, the pier quickly became a terminus transferring passengers from streetcars to the small passenger boats connecting with Lincoln Park.

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#### The Lakeside End of Municipal Pier, 1916-1917



**Figure 3.** The "festive" end of Municipal Pier, three thousand feet into Lake Michigan, contained a number of amusements and recreational facilities when the pier first opened, including a dance hall, auditorium, restaurants, and a carousel (not unlike its present incarnation). The vessel in the middle of the photograph is the gas launch *Columbia* 206955, built at Chicago in 1909, which would play a role in the sinking of the *Mary M*. William Lafferty Collection.



**Figure 4.** Another view of the east end of Municipal Pier, circa 1917, showing part of the pier's boardwalk (advertised as the "longest between the two Oceans") as well as portions of its restaurant and auditorium facilities. The vessel shown is yet another *Columbia* 91772 [a *Mascotte*], built at Wyandotte, Michigan, in 1885. By the time the *Columbia* arrived for service on Chicago's lakefront in 1917, she had already done similar stints at Toledo, Detroit, Buffalo, Sault Ste. Marie, and Duluth. From a color postcard published by Gerson Brothers, Chicago. William Lafferty Collection.

For over the next decade following the opening of Municipal Pier, each summer a flotilla of single- and double-decked excursion boats plied the short route between Municipal Pier and the Lincoln Park boat landing adjacent to the park's "High Bridge." The boats themselves represented an interesting cross-section of Great Lakes passenger vessels, ranging from new-built internal combustion vessels constructed specially for the trade to venerable steamboats that, after serving years on routes elsewhere on the lakes, came to Chicago to spend their final years gracefully in the day excursion trade on the short haul between Lincoln Park and Municipal Pier. This issue of *Lake Michigan Maritime Marginalia* centers upon three such vessels, the *Mary M.* and *Favorite*, built for the route, and the aged *Mineral City*, a veteran of Lake St. Clair, that came to Chicago to play out her days.

*Continue for the story of the Mary M.*

*LMMM Home*